



BOOK REVIEWS

ON RACE RELATIONS

TWENTY-FIVE years ago when the study of race relations had only begun, no one foresaw its growth. It is significant that there is no article on 'prejudice' or on 'discrimination' in that great monument of American scholarship, the *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences*, completed in 1935. To-day no one, outside South Africa, could possibly produce a book about race relations without employing those tools of analysis, the terms 'prejudice' and 'discrimination'.

Discrimination, the more familiar phenomenon, manifests itself in the operation of law, being the publicly sanctioned imposition of a disability on the ground of race, colour, or religion.

Prejudice is a word not yet as commonly used as discrimination. It is, however, a useful and necessary term which does not mean the same thing as discrimination. Prejudice is defined by Professor Gordon Allport as "an avertive or hostile attitude towards a person who belongs to a group (or race), simply because he belongs to that group, and is therefore presumed to have the objectionable qualities ascribed to the group". Examples of prejudice in South Africa are these: the civil service will not employ Indians; or that the commercial banks will not employ Jews; or that shops will not normally employ Africans to serve the public from behind the counter. Any educated African can tell dozens of stories about the prejudice he has had to endure. In all cases of prejudice there is no law compelling those responsible to behave as they do, but tradition or practice has produced a form of behaviour almost as firmly as law could.

One of the most important achievements of the Nationalist Government in South Africa has been to strengthen colour

prejudice by raising its practices to the level of laws that can be broken only on pain of punishment. The measures passed in the 1957 session of Parliament to control private social intercourse between Black and White are the keystone in the great arch of legislation erected since 1948. To appreciate the enormity of this achievement, unique in the contemporary world, one needs to get a glimpse of what is being written on race relations in the United States and in Britain. Fortunately, a stream of books on the subject continues to flow from the publishers.

Of recent books much the most distinguished has come from an American Negro, Professor E. Franklin Frazier of Howard University in Washington, D.C. **The Black Bourgeoisie** (published by *The Free Press, Glencoe, Illinois*) is not merely a study but a candid criticism of the Negro middle-class. We in Africa have rightly been accustomed to think of the American Negroes as the most advanced of all Coloured peoples. Their African heritage having virtually vanished, the Negroes have been increasingly integrated into American culture since the emancipation of the slaves. Of course, the Whites in the Southern States have also led the world in the discovery and invention of a variety of techniques and arguments whereby the Negroes could be—and still are—denied full equality. So ingenious and subtle are some of these techniques and arguments that by contrast they show up *apartheid* and its apostles in all their simple crudity.

Professor Frazier's aim has been to demonstrate that the Negro's acceptance of middle-class values has not secured for him an ample measure of either racial equality or social justice. On the contrary, it has landed him in a world of make-believe. Take first the myth of Negro business. The Negroes have achieved their greatest commercial success in the insurance companies and newspapers which they own and operate. At first glance this looks like a considerable achievement, and so it is by comparison with the absence of anything like it in any part of Africa. But Mr. Frazier has plenty of facts and figures to prove that Negro commerce amounts in reality to an insignificant part of the American economy. Even in Harlem Whites run twice as many small businesses as Negroes.

This analysis could have been carried further. The Negro middle-class is more advanced than the African middle-class, even on the West coast, but, like the African middle-class, it is not a true *bourgeoisie* of the kind that provided the essential

element in the progress of Western Europe. The main reason why it is only a *petite bourgeoisie* is that it has not yet succeeded in accumulating resources of capital for productive investment. It represents less a special economic interest than a general emotional and intellectual revolt against restrictive laws and personal indignity. The Negroes, like most educated Africans, want the kind of equality that is supposed to exist in a free, competitive society based on capitalism, not the sort of equality that socialists hope to achieve in a classless society. But neither in America nor in Africa has the Black middle-class been able to secure for itself that solid, comfortable share of the economy which comes from investment, as distinct from the much smaller share which comes from the employment of personal services, as in the professions.

This economic difference has had important political consequences in Africa but not in America. In the United States (and it is a pity that Mr. Frazier does not go on to point this out) the Negroes have not in the past been an effective political force, holding a real balance of power; nor, apparently, have they aimed to occupy such a position. Nor is there a major party of the Left to which they could attach themselves in effective numbers. The situation in South Africa shows a significant contrast. Public policy has long prevented the growth of a Black middle-class, even to the limited extent visible among American Negroes. There is virtually no African middle-class, if the test is not simply a white collar but access to opportunities for trade investment, speculation, and substantial profit-making in general. As a result, the emerging middle-class of the modest professional and clerical type (including teachers, preachers, clerks, and the like) have been forced to ally themselves with the African working-class and to make common cause with them against the injustices and disabilities imposed on all Africans by virtue of their race. Does not this fact go far to explain the radical (and not merely liberal) direction taken by the African National Congress in recent years? Congress seems to have broadened its aims and activities from a desire for better opportunities for the middle-class and freedom from legal disabilities to a demand for a national minimum wage coupled with minimum standards of welfare for all the people.

To return to Mr. Frazier's book, what has distorted the picture of the Negroes' position is the exaggerated version of it constantly given by the Negro press. There are 169 Negro newspapers,

all but seven being weeklies, and they are all controlled by Negroes. (Compare with this the sad fact that in South Africa there is not a single periodical run by Africans.) The main function of these papers is to depict the Negroes as people who have achieved social status in the eyes of Americans. Mr. Frazier gives illuminating examples of this habit; for instance, reports of conspicuous personal expenditure supposed to reflect glory on those with the money to spend so lavishly. Moreover, even in political affairs, whether domestic or international, the Negro press is careful never to take a line that deviates from what is respectable in the White press. When American troops were fighting an action in Indo-China in 1953 that brought the world to the brink of total war, the Negro papers were content to note with satisfaction the employment of Black men among the combatants. On the subject of the press, Mr. Frazier might perhaps have noted in passing that the press of any minority group tends to behave in a similar way.

What all this reveals is that the strenuous efforts of the Negroes to attain middle-class status amount to 'nothing' (the word is Mr. Frazier's). Perhaps no one but a Negro scholar of Professor Frazier's distinction could have written such a sharp exposure of the limits of bourgeois values and achievements. If any other scholar had done this, his work would have risked being dismissed as the product of either racial prejudice or unsound radicalism. Is it not itself a welcome sign of emancipation from orthodox ideas and of intellectual integrity at a high level that such a book should now come from the pen of a leading Negro? How long will we have to wait before an African appears who can write with such insight and detachment about Africans? It may be a very long time and, in our impatience, we need to remember how long it has taken nationalities with fewer obstacles in their way to produce their own critics.

To turn from this book to recent British literature is to enter a simpler world, untroubled by the complexities of race relations or by social theory and thus lacking the insight capable of penetrating much below the surface of things. Britain is coming up against the problems of inter-racial contacts and conflicts, yet very few Englishmen are well equipped to analyse them. There is still an inclination to believe that goodwill and kindness will somehow find a way through them. In **They Seek a Living** (*Hutchinson*), Miss Joyce Egginton begins by describing the situation in Jamaica and other Caribbean islands that drives

West Indians to Britain in a stream that will not slacken. The main facts about the poverty of the people, their illusions about Britain, their inevitable disappointments there, and the attitudes towards Coloured people they encounter in the big cities—all these have already been recorded, notably in the books that embody the research work done at the University of Edinburgh under the inspiration of Dr. Kenneth Little, the British pioneer in this field of study. Miss Egginton has nothing much to add, but her readable book will reach a public that finds the reports of more detailed investigations hard to digest.

One of the best reports is that written by two West Indians, Clarence Senior and Douglas Manley. The Fabian Society in London did well to ask Mr. Norman Mackenzie, an assistant editor of *The New Statesman*, to condense their report on **The West Indian in Britain** and to publish it as a Fabian pamphlet. What strikes one about the survey, and likewise about Mr. Mackenzie's preface and Miss Egginton's book, is how tolerant the British are about a situation that grows worse with every passing year. To cope with it they have hardly anything more effective to propose than the sort of kindly measures that Lady Bountiful would recommend for helping the deserving poor anywhere. Neither of the British writers seems to know that prejudice has been the subject of intensive and extensive study in the United States, especially in the last fifteen years. Consequently, they do not recognize that prejudice is a plant which will flourish if it is not regarded as a weed to be uprooted. Prejudice does not remain stationary: it either grows or dies, according as it is assisted or attacked. We in South Africa know all too well how quickly prejudice can be encouraged by a multiplicity of laws and conventions the like of which no other country has had to suffer. The British, while always ready to censure *apartheid*, have so far done very little to prevent the growth of colour prejudice in Britain itself.

There is one good, straight-forward test to apply to the British. Those who are serious in their desire to curb prejudice must clamour for the House of Commons to pass a Bill making it unlawful to practise racial discrimination in the provision of any public amenity. This would mean that no hotel or restaurant or landlady with rooms to let could refuse occupation or service to anyone for reasons of race or colour; and that, likewise, no public body, such as a municipal corporation, and no state-controlled industry could refuse to employ anyone for such

reasons. A Private Member's Bill on these lines has, in fact, been introduced into the House of Commons several times in the last few years, but it has made no progress. Various objections to it are brought forward by the Conservatives. They argue that there is no need for such a law; that it would not work; that it is contrary to English legal tradition; that, anyhow, law can't cure prejudice; and so on. Of course, no British M.P. would ever countenance any obvious form of racial discrimination, nor would he approve of the kind of colour prejudice that refuses service to a Black man entering a public bar or hotel. But, equally, few British M.P.s, except a handful of Labour members, have displayed any enthusiasm for a Bill of the kind indicated.

The answer to those who say that a law against racial discrimination will not work is that such a law is in fact working in a dozen American states, including New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Illinois. Negroes in these states who are refused service can—and regularly do—sue the proprietors of the restaurant for damages. It is true, of course, that the passing of such a Bill would not deter every London landlady from excluding Coloured men from her lodgings. But many laws of all kinds continue to be broken year after year although offenders are penalized. The value of a law like the American statutes lies in its announcement that the country or community disapproves of certain conduct and therefore makes it liable to a penalty. In other words, legislation can be employed to help *create* public opinion of the kind desired by the legislators.

To understand this it is necessary to perceive that legislation is not necessarily what it normally is, a response to the pressure of public or group opinion or emotion. Legislation in the sphere of race relations can be a powerful agency employed to create or to fortify a body of opinion that without this artificial support would not exist or might in time suffer defeat by rival opinions in an open contest. This is a view generally accepted by American sociologists but not appreciated by the British, to whom sociology has remained rather a closed book. Dr. Verwoerd, however, could explain the significance of this view to the British without difficulty because he is a trained sociologist as well as a politician who applies his knowledge of society.

In some countries such as the United States, Soviet Russia, and even to some extent Northern Rhodesia, legislation is being

used to prohibit racial discrimination and to combat the colour prejudice which breeds it. It is South Africa's unique distinction to pass more and more legislation to increase discrimination and so to prevent prejudice from declining. Mr. Strijdom and other Nationalist leaders recognize that as industrialization and urbanization proceed, closer contact between the races would inevitably lead in time to a gradual reduction of prejudice and to its eventual disappearance in an effective form unless this trend were reversed by law, as it has been with mounting effect since 1948. That is why Dr. Verwoerd is quite right, from his point of view, to try and restrain even social intercourse, which is bound to diminish colour prejudice between the races. And, equally, the British are quite wrong, from their point of view, to refrain from using the moral force of law to curb the growth of prejudice against Coloured people in Britain. All the leading American sociologists are to-day agreed about the effects of public law in reducing private prejudice. A study of the use of law in South Africa for the opposite purpose would fully confirm their view of the role of law in race relations. It is time for people who are themselves free from prejudice, to recognize law as an agency of social control that can be used equally to promote or to eradicate popular prejudice. It is a pity that while South African Nationalists are busy using law to promote prejudice, British liberals and socialists who hate *apartheid* hesitate to use law, as Americans do, to eradicate it.

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